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## \$425,000

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COURTESY KARA CROWELL

Trout Point Lodge owners Charles Leary, left, and Vaughn Perret have been awarded \$425,000 in damages after an American blogger defamed them on a web blog.

**By:** Richard J. Brennan National Affairs Writer, Published on Thu Feb 02 2012

For two years, a Mississippi blogger conducted a vitriolic “nightmare” campaign against two gay Nova Scotia men who operate a wilderness getaway near Kemptville in the southwest end of the province.

Doug K. Handshoe, a certified public accountant and inveterate blogger, has never met the Trout Point Lodge owners Charles Leary and Vaughn Perret or stayed at their getaway. Yet he consistently made graphic homophobic comments on his website, accused the two owners of all kinds of criminal acts and disparaged the small resort in the Tobeatic Wilderness reserve.

“It’s been a nightmare, I have to tell you,” an emotional Perret told the *Toronto Star* Thursday.

Nova Scotia Supreme Court Justice Suzanne Hood agreed and this week awarded Leary and Perret \$425,000 in damages — reported to be the largest defamation damage award in Nova Scotia history — and issued a permanent injunction against Handshoe.

EXHIBIT

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Besides Leary, 45, and Perret, 52, there is third partner in the 12-unit lodge, Daniel Abel of New Orleans. All three are Americans.

Handshoe, who considers himself a bit of forensic auditor, told the *Star* in an interview he has no intentions of paying and will go to the U.S. court to have the Canadian ruling struck down on the basis that it is an affront to his constitutional rights of freedom of speech.

"I won't be gagged," he said. "In the U.S. . . . we are allowed to call people bad names if we want."

Perret and Leary were collateral damage of alleged political corruption that has its roots in Louisiana, where former Jefferson Parish president Aaron Broussard and other parish officials are under indictment in a federal probe of alleged corruption.

It turns out that Broussard owned two cottages on the same road as Trout Point Lodge, but New Orleans' *The Times-Picayune* mistakenly reported that Broussard owned Trout Point Lodge. The award-winning paper later apologized for the error in the 2010 story. That's where Handshoe came into the picture.

He refused to believe the correction and insisted for more than two years that Perret and Leary were part of the conspiracy, leaning heavily on the fact the two once managed Broussard's cottages and that Broussard and the two men were members of the Billy's Hill Trail Society.

"So I started investigating and the more I dug the more I found," Handshoe said.

"We don't know him, we've never seen him, we've never met him. We have no idea who he is other than he's this blogger in Mississippi . . . other than he turned his sights on us," Perret said. "Partially, it's homophobia. If you look at the blog you will see constant references really homophobic language, hateful language."

Handshoe insisted, "I'm not homophobic at all" and that repeatedly calling the two Nova Scotia men "girls" is a matter of freedom of speech. And as for *The Times-Picayune* running two retractions, he said, "seeing newspapers retract factual stories is nothing new."

In 1998, Leary and Perret left Louisiana, where they ran a small organic farm, because of homophobic attitudes. They moved to Nova Scotia and started operating the gay friendly lodge in 2000. Handshoe's campaign started in January 2010.

During her 75-minute ruling, Justice Hood took particular exception to comments that Handshoe made the day after he was served with the lawsuit in which he stated:

"I have built complete dossiers on all the players in this social group and I intend through time to roll out each and every one in excruciating detail as long as the lawsuit in Canada is an outstanding issue for (his blog) *Slabbed*. The reason for this is that this band of gay men act as a unit that will also scatter like cockroaches when the heat is applied."

Leary said the whole experience has been an insight in the underbelly of the Internet.

"It has been just a terrible experience," he said.